

May 16, 2003

Curt Stoelting, CEO
Peter Henseler, President
RC2
314 W. Superior, 6th Floor
Chicago, IL 60610-3537

Re: Lamaze Baby Toy Recall

Dear Messrs. Stoelting and Henseler:

It recently came to our attention that two of your Lamaze brand products were recalled due to their lead content (*Recall Alert, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, April 4, 2003, SKU #97222, SKU #97325*). As advocates in the areas of children's health and education, we recognize that our goals are very similar to those of your company. We write this letter to convey our admiration of your goal to promote the cognitive development of children, but also to express our deepest concerns regarding the recalled products.

While we appreciate your prompt action to recall these defective products, we believe that there are some issues that need to be further addressed in order to wholly remedy the situation. Given the logistics involved in recalling products¹ and the fact that only a small percentage of recalled products are actually returned to the manufacturer or distributor, we believe it is imperative that RC2 as the parent company of Learning Curve, take steps to actively disseminate information about the recalled products and contribute to much needed public awareness promoting lead poisoning prevention.

Of particular concern is the fact that both recalled toys have paint on their metal wires containing excess levels of lead, despite the fact that lead paint is banned as a hazardous substance. It is banned for good reason. The effects of lead on a child's developing brain and nervous system are often permanent. At high levels, lead poisoning causes damage to the child's nervous system, kidneys, and reproductive system. Even at low and moderate levels, lead poisoning can cause learning disabilities, problems with speech, shortened attention span, hyperactivity and

¹ Calls to nine Chicago area stores found that three reported that they had at least one of the items in stock and only one store mentioned the recall. None of the websites that carry Lamaze brand products posted or even referenced the recall notice. We also identified websites that still advertise the products for sale. Even Learning Curve's own website still carries the product, despite the link to the recall information.

behavioral problems.² Although childhood lead poisoning is an entirely preventable disease, an estimated half million children in the U.S. are lead poisoned. Indeed, Chicago (home of RC2/Learning Curve) has more lead poisoned children than any other city in the U.S., with over 12,000 children identified in 2001. There is little doubt that lead poisoning takes its toll on the children and families who suffer from its devastating physiological and neurological effects, but there are public costs as well. It is estimated that the total cost of lead poisoning in the U.S. each year is \$43.4 billion. (See "Environmental Pollutants and Disease in American children: Estimates of Morbidity, Mortality, and Costs for Lead Poisoning, Asthma, Cancer, and Developmental Disabilities", Landrigan, Philip J. *et al.*, July 2002, Environmental Health Perspectives, July 2002, Volume 110, Number 7). Indeed, lead poisoning prevention is an issue that requires immediate attention.

In light of these facts, we were surprised to learn that Learning Curve, a respected and leading maker and developer of high quality toys, has allowed its manufacturers to utilize lead-based paint in the production of these toys, particularly because such manufacture is illegal in the U.S. In our view, the manufacture and distribution of toys containing lead is completely antithetical to Learning Curve's well-intentioned commitment to help children advance physically and cognitively.

We respect Learning Curve's goal to provide quality children's products that are backed with Learning Curve's unconditional lifetime guarantee. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with representatives of RC2/Leaning Curve to learn about actions already taken on the part of your company as well as to discuss possible remedial and preventative conduct you might choose, such as sponsoring lead poisoning prevention and child product safety campaigns.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter. Amy Zimmerman will be contacting you next week to arrange a meeting at a mutually convenient time.

² According to a recently released study in the New England Journal of Medicine, it is suggested that lead may be harmful even at very low blood concentrations. The results of the study indicated damage to intellectual functioning as a result of blood lead concentrations below 10 micrograms per deciliter; ultimately suggesting that more U.S. children may be adversely affected by environmental lead than previously estimated. (See "Intellectual Impairment in Children with Blood Lead Concentrations below 10 :g per Deciliter", Canfield, Richard L. *et al.* 17 April 2003, Volume 348:1517-1526.)

Sincerely,

Amy L. Zimmerman
Assistant Director
Children's Health and Education Project
Chicago Lawyers' Committee
for Civil Rights Under Law

Nancy A. Cowles
Executive Director
Kids In Danger

Jerome Stermer
President
Voices for Illinois Children

Anita Weinberg
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